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Common Cause asks Nicaraguan aid inquiry

FROM COMBINED DISPATCHES

A private lobbying group has asked the House and Senate intelligence committees to investigate whether the National Security Council violated the law by aiding the Nicaraguan resistance.

President Reagan signed a foreign aid measure last week authorizing \$27 million in non-military aid to the rebel forces, but until then the administration had been prohibited by the so-called Boland amendment from providing such aid.

The amendment barred the use of government funds during the 1985 fiscal year "for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras."

The prohibition extended to the CIA, the Defense Department "or any other agency or entity of the United States involved in intelligence activities."

In a letter to the chairmen of the intelligence committees, Common Cause, which calls itself a citizens lobby, called for an inquiry "of whether the NSC activities violate the letter or spirit of the law."

Administration officials confirmed last week that the NSC, which advises the president on military and national security matters, had been helping some resistance groups — the so-called "Contras" — plan operations and raise money.

However, the officials defended this activity and denied there was any violation of law.

In the letter to the committee chairmen, Common Cause President Fred Wertheimer said:

"The NSC's involvement with the Contras during the period the Boland amendment has been in effect raises major questions of whether this broad congressional prohibition has been violated and, if not, whether NSC's activities violate the spirit and intent of Congress in enacting the amendment."

"Issues of war and peace are critical to the people of this nation," the letter added. "Under the Constitution, the power to make war is reserved to the Congress. Both the Boland Amendment and the recent foreign aid legislation reflect congressional efforts to set limits on U.S. military involvement in Nicaragua."

Congress is now in recess and no action can be taken on the request until legislators return in early September.

Adolfo Calero, commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, said in an interview with The Associated Press that the questions raised about the propriety of the NSC dealings with the resistance fighters were "silly."

The resistance forces have been able to strengthen their position with the help of \$1 million in donations they receive each month from a worldwide fund-raising network, Mr. Calero said.